Latrobe Valley Naturalist

November – December 2019 Issue No. 605

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General meetings

Held at 7:30 pm on the fourth Friday of each month at the Newborough Uniting Church, Old Sale Road Newborough VIC 3825



Morwell River Wetlands, a key study area for Peter Homan's fauna surveys, and for the Club's quarterly bird surveys for Energy Australia (Photo: Peter Homan).

Upcoming events

November general meeting: Friday 22 November
Pea Plants – Royce Raleigh
Excursion: Saturday 23 November – Moondarra State Park. Meet 10am at Tyers River Bridge on Moe-Walhalla Rd (~18 km N of Moe)
Bird Group: Thursday 28 November – EA Wetlands survey. Meet by 8.30am at the Morwell Bridge Gate, off old Princes Hwy.
Bird Challenge Count: Friday 29 November – Sun 1 December.
Christmas Party: Saturday 7 December – Phil & Gill's place
January general meeting: Friday 17 January 2020
Summer Members' Night
Club Summer Camp at Cape Paterson: Friday 31 January – Tuesday 4 February
Botany Group: Saturday 8 February – Indoors, looking at plants from Cape Paterson camp.

Fauna surveys in the Morwell-Yallourn district 2005-2019



At our April meeting, Peter Homan spoke about his long-term fauna monitoring work around Morwell and Yallourn, the impact of the 2014 bushfire on wildlife in this area, and changes in the methods used to survey wildlife over the years.

Peter began by stating he had been a member of the Field Naturalists Club of Victoria since 1965, developing his fauna trapping and identification skills during their regular expeditions. He has spent the past 20 years working as a fauna consultant for various clients including Parks Victoria, DELWP, City of Whittlesea, Gippsland Water, Energy Australia, Land for Wildlife and Landcare.

Peter focused his talk on surveys undertaken around Energy Australia's Yallourn coalmine, which incorporated both remnant bushland and revegetated areas. The purpose of these surveys was to determine which species of mammals, reptiles, amphibians and birds were present, particularly any that were utilising revegetated sites and, after the 2014 mine fire, any species that had survived and recolonised burnt areas since the fire.

A few terms were then explained, such as *effort:* the amount of work undertaken, measured by trap nights. A *trap night* is calculated as the number of traps (including camera traps) multiplied by the number of nights they are set for, e.g. 20 traps set for 3 nights = 60 trap nights. The *capture rate* is the number of animals captured/recorded per 100 trap nights, e.g. if 200 trap nights are completed and 12 bush rats are captured, then the capture rate for bush rats is 6%. A capture rate of more than 10% usually indicates relatively high abundance of a species and good habitat.



Camera trap used for wildlife monitoring (Photo: Peter Homan)

Peter followed with a selection of photos and short videos showing the various trap types used and some of the animals captured by them. Notably, there is an increasing reliance on using cameras, which, if set up well, can save hours of survey time, are invaluable as a means of species identification and give a truer indication of species presence. Elliot, pitfall and funnel traps are still used extensively, as are mist nets, harp traps and bat detectors (devices that can record bat calls, which are mostly at frequencies above the range of human detection). These are complemented by traditional survey methods such as stagwatching and spotlight surveys, with improvements in the latter having been afforded by LED lights and better battery storage.

The overall results speak for themselves, with 163 vertebrate species recorded during over 5,277 trap nights undertaken so far: 27 mammals, 112 birds, 16 reptiles and 8 amphibians.

Of particular interest was the site analysis of the Witts Gully study area, which revealed that no Dusky Antechinus were recorded in 2008 and only one in 2012, but after nearly 90% of the site was burnt in 2014, 10 were recorded in April of 2019.



Dusky antechinus (Photo: Peter Homan)

Based on the findings of his surveys, Peter concluded that small areas of remnant vegetation play a crucial role in providing core wildlife habitat, staging points for animals moving through the landscape, and refuges from which species can recolonise fire-affected areas and adjacent mine revegetation sites. The results of Peter's surveys will surely provide an invaluable resource to inform other local land management projects currently being proposed, such as wildlife corridors and bio-links.

Peter finished by acknowledging all his field support assistants and the Energy Australia and Indigenous Design Environmental Management staff members who have been, and continue to be, involved in these surveys.

Denis Nagle

Tarra-Bulga fungi excursion 25.05.2019

This excursion was very well attended with 27 club members and visitors meeting at the Visitors Centre in Tarra-Bulga National Park with our leaders for the day, Dr Sapphire McMullan-Fisher from Fungimap and Dr Tom May from Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria.

Following their talk the previous evening, where we were introduced to the online Fungimap Project available on iNaturalist, we were going to learn to recognise and identify the fungi we saw and, for those interested, get some help uploading photos to iNaturalist.

After driving to the Tarra Valley Picnic Area, we set off along the track to Cyathea Falls, then each of our leaders took half of the group in opposite directions around the loop. We were with Sapphire on West Track and in the hour and a half allotted only walked about 10 minutes from the start due to the number and variety of fungi to be seen.

Sapphire imparted a wealth of information on their identification and ecology. Apart from some of the most common or recognisable fungi, she suggested we only try to get as far as the genus when identifying and she pointed out features of different genera to help us with that. She suggested that we consider texture and form to help with recognition.

I was taking photographs while Joëlle took notes, but there were so many kinds of fungi it was hard to keep up with all the information Sapphire was imparting.

Pixies' Parasols *Mycena interrupta* are one of the fungi that are easy to recognise, and there was a colony of these delicate, viscid, blue umbrella-shaped fruiting bodies growing on a rotting log.

Just as pretty was a little, bright-red toadstool called *Cruentomycena viscidocruenta* – much easier to remember by their common name Ruby Bonnets, but it also helps to know that *cruenta* means 'bloody' and it had a viscid cap.

Two other *Mycena* species were found, again quite distinctive; *Mycena albidocapillaris*, with the common name Pins, are tiny white pin-head caps to 5 mm wide, on long stems with short hairs. They were growing on a decaying fern frond. Knowing that *albida* = white and *capillaris* = hair-like makes the species name easier to remember. *Mycena cystidiosa* is usually seen as a mass of white hair like threads, which are the rhizomorphs, but the whitish-brown fruiting bodies have convex, striate caps on long, delicate stems.

Another delicate-looking gilled toadstool with a long stem and convex striate cap was a *Marasmius* species, and Sapphire told us that to tell it from a *Mycena*, a *Marasmius* stem is more rubbery and resistant to breaking whereas *Mycena* stems are fragile and break easily. I have since read that *Marasmius* are defined as being *marcescent,* which means they can dry out but later revive when moistened as compared with the putrescent or rotting nature of most mushrooms.

Mycena and *Marasmius* are two of the main litter-recycling genera. These break down leaf litter and twigs, recycling nutrients so they are available to plants. The fungi mycelium and fruit bodies are also important food for invertebrates.



Oyster mushroom (Photo: Wendy Savage)

A parasite of trees and other plants was *Armillaria novae-zelandiae,* a much larger yellowish-gilled fungus with a distinct skirt on the stem, which is the remnant of the covering between the rim and the stem after the button opens.

Oyster mushrooms *Pleurotus* were growing on some decaying wood, and these are typically found in wet forest or rainforest. They were fan-shaped and creamy white with a brown tinge on top, and white gills underneath were radiating from the short stem attachment.

Waxcaps have thicker waxy gills and smooth, ringless stems and may have slimy caps. They are commonly found in moss beds. One that is most commonly found in rainforests, *Hygrocybe astatogala,* has a rather pointy cap and its colour can vary from yellow through to red. It can blacken with age or if handled. The very pretty one I photographed was a deep browny-red with a little frill of white around the cap and black radial fibrils.



Trumpet fungus (Photo: Wendy Savage)

The find of the day for me was a Trumpet *Craterellus sp.* that grows with *Nothofagus* in rainforest, so we're not likely to see it often. It is an undescribed species that is khaki brown, not black like the one pictured in Bruce Fuhrer's fungi book. It looked just like a group of little trumpets standing on their ends, black inside and creamy white outside.

There were some large old Southern Brackets *Ganoderma australe* high in the trees and some young ones lower down with fresh, creamy white undersides. There were many other types of fungi such as the Snow Fungus *Tremella fusiformis* looking like a white jelly, the bracket Rainbow Fungus *Trametes versicolor* and the coral fungus Yellow Fingers *Clavaria amoena*.

We lunched in the shelter at the picnic area, then our leaders had to drive to Bairnsdale to give a presentation and excursion for the Bairnsdale Field Naturalists Club. After lunch we drove to Bulga Park and walked around Fern Gully Track where there was another rich and varied range of fungi to be seen, but we just looked and enjoyed rather than taking notes for a write-up.

This was a really inspiring excursion, and a number of us have now joined iNaturalist and are posting our fungi photos onto Fungimap. Fortunately Ken Harris, Matt Campbell, Tamara Leitch and

David Mules have been able to transfer their thousands of photographs from Bowerbird across to iNaturalist and continue posting there.

It's worth noting three local iNaturalist projects that have been set up: Morwell National Park by Matt, Tarra-Bulga National Park by Ken and Boolarra Nature Conservation by Joëlle. By using the GPS data on photographs, these projects capture all observations entered into iNaturalist which have been photographed within the set location boundaries of the projects.

Link to iNaturalist Fungimap project:

https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/fungimap-australia.



Southern Bracket (Photo: Wendy Savage)

Thanks to Tom and Sapphire for such an interesting and informative excursion, and to Sapphire for proof-reading and correcting this report.

Wendy Savage & Joëlle Champert

Birds of Papua New Guinea

For our June meeting, our president David Stickney gave us a snapshot of his July 2018 trip to Papua New Guinea. His trip was to the forested highlands and it was the wonderful forest birds that we were shown.

A sad start was seeing a headdress and being told that the ornate plumes decorating one headdress required the killing of four King of Saxony Birds-of-Paradise.

Papua New Guinea (PNG) shares much of its fauna with Australia, while countries to the west of the Wallace Line have a mainly Asian fauna. PNG has more species than Australia in many of our familiar groups of birds (see table).

We were shown 15 different birds-of-paradise including the Raggiana Bird-of-Paradise, which is the emblem of Papua New Guinea and is shown on its flag and coat of arms.

Species richness of birds in Papua New Guinea

	PNG & West Papua	Australia
Birds-of-paradise	42	4
Cassowary	3	1
Megapodes	26	3
Bowerbirds	21	8
Owlet-nightjars	10	1
Honeyeaters	191	57
Whistlers	58	9



Magnificent Bird-of-Paradise (Photo: David Stickney)

The King of Saxony Bird-of-Paradise was shown displaying to its mate and the Magnificent Bird-of-Paradise showing its curled blue tail feathers.

The Dwarf Cassowary, followed by two raptors and the Rufous Owl (also found in Australia) were next, and then the Papuan Frogmouth and Barred Owlet-nightjar. The Papuan Hornbill was the exception to the Australian fauna link. Hornbills are Asian (and African) and only one species

has strayed into PNG.

PNG has 69 parrot species, more than Australia, and David showed us 13 of them, including the Palm Cockatoo (also found in Australia). Then we saw three of PNG's 34 kingfishers, the Victoria Crowned Pigeon and eight other pigeons, the Channel-billed Cuckoo and a variety of Passerines, including five honeyeaters, one bowerbird and two whistlers.



Superb Birds-of-Paradise (Photo: David Stickney)

Like Australia, most PNG mammals are marsupials, but mostly very hard to see. We were shown photos of the Speckled Dasyure – a small cousin of our Quolls – and a Tree Kangaroo, taken in captivity.

David finished off with a diversion to an earlier trip he had made to Sabah, the north-western corner of Borneo. He showed us a woodpecker (woodpeckers are my favourite birds, although Australia does not have any) and another hornbill, but mainly some of the much more visible mammals (with no marsupials).



Sunda Clouded Leopard (Photo: David Stickney)

We were shown three primates including the Bornean Orangutan and Proboscis Monkey, the Bornean Pygmy Elephant, a squirrel, and two predators: the Malay Civet and the beautiful Sunda Clouded Leopard.

I was left in envy of David for his two trips and the wonderful range of photos of birds and mammals that he showed us.

Ken Harris

Arboreal mammal surveys for conservation management

Our speaker at the August club meeting was Louise Durkin from DELWP's Arthur Rylah Institute (ARI). She is a wildlife ecologist, focusing on threatened species and working in Lindy Lumsden's team. Having grown up in the Thorpdale area, she was happy to be able to join us for the following night's spotlighting near Mirboo North.

Following an introduction to ARI, Louise's informative and well-structured talk consisted of two parts, the first on Leadbeater's Possum *Gymnobelideus leadbeateri* and the second covering the Greater Glider *Petauroides volans.* Each part covered the relevant biology and ecology before summarising the results of recent survey work in Victoria.

Leadbeater's Possum, a member of the Petauridae family, is a small nocturnal arboreal marsupial that is Victoria's faunal emblem. It is listed as Critically Endangered under the federal *Environment Protection & Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act 1999* and as Threatened under Victoria's *Flora and Fauna Guarantee (FFG) Act 1988*. The possum lives in colonies of 2-12 individuals, which defend small territories 1-3 ha in size. It was rediscovered in 1961, having been presumed extinct after an absence of sightings for 52 years. Sadly, the possum is now restricted to a 70 x 95 km zone in the

Central Highlands, extending as far east as the slopes of the Baw Baw Plateau. It occupies three distinct habitat types: montane ash forest, Snow Gum woodlands and lowland floodplain woodland, which are all dominated by smooth-barked gums, the bark of which is used for nesting material and foraging. Hollow-bearing trees are critical for nesting and shelter, with 30 cm diameter hollows being needed. The possums also require a good density of acacias to facilitate movement through the forest, and also as a food source. They spend 70-80% of their time in the den.



Leadbeater's Possum (Photo: Tamara Leitch and Claire McCall)

It follows that the species is vulnerable to disturbances which include fire and timber harvesting. The major 2009 fires burnt 34% of its range; the surviving populations live in isolated unburnt patches. The Leadbeater's Possum Advisory Group recommended 200 m radius harvesting exclusion zones around both existing and new colonies. Thus it was necessary to undertake new surveys to update specific location data. The species is challenging to survey. While stagwatching and thermal cameras have been used in the past, the use of remote-sensing cameras has proven to be far more effective during the round of surveys undertaken from 2014-2017. A total of 289 sites was surveyed, with two or three cameras per site, set approximately 100 m apart. The presence of Leadbeater's Possums was recorded at 149 (52%) of the sites. Results suggested that three cameras per site for four weeks would likely detect the possums if they were present. Creamed honey was deemed the best bait to lure them in. One important conclusion from the survey work has been that State Forests have an important part to play in the conservation of the species.



Greater Glider (Photo: David Stickney)

Turning to the Greater Glider, a member of the Pseudocheiridae family, Louise noted that it is our largest gliding possum species, being able to glide up to 100 m. It is listed as Vulnerable under the *EPBC Act 1999* and Threatened under the *FFG Act 1988*. Its range extends from Queensland to Victoria and it is widely-distributed across the eastern half of our state. It is an obligate folivore, with eucalypt leaves as its main food source. Again, it needs hollow-bearing trees; individuals use multiple den trees, typically between 4 and 20 trees. Mating occurs in autumn, with births in April and May. Population growth is slow, as not all females breed every year and when they do, they produce a single offspring which reaches maturity after two years. The gliders have a small home range with high site fidelity and, interestingly, are heat-sensitive. Their Vulnerable status reflects substantial recent declines, despite once being common.

In survey work, spotlighting has proven to be the best detection method, as the relatively large animals have a bright eyeshine and they remain stationary for long periods. A late-2017 survey was conducted in the Strathbogie Ranges. Using 500 m transects, the average number of Greater Glider detections was 4.1 per

transect (range 0-14). The study yielded an estimate of 69,000 gliders in the Strathbogies. On the positive front, there was no evidence of a decline in abundance by comparison with surveys conducted between 1980 and 1990. A subsequent survey in the Central Highlands using similar methods revealed that the relative abundance of Greater Gliders in the Strathbogies is about five times higher than in the Central Highlands; Louise suggested that this reflects the relatively low fire activity and logging pressure in the Strathbogies.

Louise responded to many questions from a large audience at the conclusion of a particularly welcome presentation, given the confusing recent picture regarding the status of these two key members of our marsupial fauna.

Gill Bremner

Greater Glider spotlighting (aka Meandering through Mirboo North mud) 24.08.2019

Twenty-two people attended the excursion to the Lyrebird Forest Walk, which is 3 km north of Mirboo North in the Mirboo North Regional Park.

We met at 6 pm and ate snacks and tested our torches and spotlights on the trees in the carpark. Louise Durkin showed us a map she had produced of the historical records of Greater Gliders in the area, including one night when 20 Greater Gliders were spotted. The map showed a contiguous area of Greater Glider habitat which is partly State Forest, including three logging coupes, and partly Regional Park. The Preserve Our Forests group continues to be active in protecting the forested areas around Mirboo North and protesting against logging of the coupes.

We headed out in balmy (for August) temperatures of 16 degrees with clear skies, so had to be careful not to mistake stars for eyeshine. An hour later it was raining and 9 degrees with no risk of mistaking stars for eyeshine. Louise led us 300 m up the track past the pumping station on the western side of the Strzelecki Highway. We saw many Ringtail Possums, a Sugar Glider and at least three Greater Gliders, which were high up in the canopy with strong double eyeshine visible in the spotlights. Greater Gliders appear big for their weight as they are very fluffy. We could see their white chests up in the canopy and a couple of animals obliged us with good views, moving up and down tree limbs, while the other hid in the thick canopy.

Given we were wet and cold, and eucalypt leaves glisten in the rain and mimic eyeshine, we decided to call it a night and head home at 8 pm, some of us heading up to the Grand Ridge Brewery to warm ourselves by the open fire.

Incidentally, the Preserve Our Forests group has a wonderful display of photographs of flora and fauna of the Mirboo North forests on the wall above the fireplace at the brewery.

Thanks to Louise for showing us these remarkable animals and how straightforward it is to find them when you know what you are doing.

Wendy Davies

Editor's note: A break in the rain saw a few of us accompany Louise to another site nearby where Greening Australia had installed 40 nestboxes for Greater Gliders and remote access cameras to monitor them. They had been placed very high in the trees by an arborist, and Louise said gliders had been using 4 of the 10 boxes with cameras on them. We saw several more gliders in this area, and a koala, but we too eventually succumbed to the weather.

BIRD CHALLENGE COUNT 2019

This year the Challenge will start on Thursday 28 November and finish on Sunday 1 December.

Last year we counted 5,710 birds which was pretty good and, I might add, fun! The teams will start their count at 8:30 am unless otherwise specified by the group leaders.

Please confirm your participation and your preferred group by emailing Joëlle joelle.champert@gmail.com or phone 0459 504 305 by Friday 22 November.

The teams:

Thursday November 28 (Bird Group day)
Energy Australia Wetlands, Crinigan Road Bushland Reserve (both in Morwell)
Leader: David Mules
Contact: Joëlle 0459 504 305

Friday November 29
Edward Hunter Reserve, Moe Water Treatment Works, Lake Narracan
Leader: David Mules
Contact: Joëlle 0459 504 305

Saturday November 30
Yarragon South, Uralla Reserve Trafalgar, Trafalgar Settlement Ponds
Leader: Wendy Savage 0428 422 461

Saturday November 30
Traralgon Railway Reservoir Conservation Reserve, Wirilda Environment Park (Tyers)
Leader: Tamara Leitch 0438 372 186

Sunday December 1
Mathison Park Churchill, Morwell National Park
Leader: Ken Harris 5122 3137

Sunday December 1
Jeeralang Junction (afternoon)
Leader: Melissa Thomson 0427 827 809



Yellow-billed and Royal Spoonbills (Photo: Joëlle Champert)

CHRISTMAS PARTY

The Club's Christmas Party this year will be held at Phil and Gill's place at 134 Ellavale Drive, Traralgon, on Saturday 7th December. Celebrations commence at 12 noon. Please BYO food for a BBQ, drinks, table and chairs. Punch, Christmas cake, tea and coffee provided, and of course… the Quiz!

REPORT ON BUSINESS MEETING 21.10.2019

Finance

Cash Management Trading Account: $3,851.06 Term Deposit: $16,720.14

Business Arising, Correspondence & General Business

- PA system: New headset microphone was trialled at September club night and worked well.
- Planning 2020 program: This went well and we had a good number of suggestions.
- Ken Smith's bequest of $7,000: Because of Ken's involvement with primary school students, Alix suggested we could consider some sort of student program/scholarship, or books for a school.
- Annual Purple Diuris count: Dawson count attended by 3 people and counted 20 orchids (only 7 were counted last year). Longford count to be held on Wednesday 23rd October at 10 am.
- John Poppins' box of material to be assessed for possible inclusion in club archives. John, David S and Wendy to look at it before the November meeting.
- Bon's plant lists: Phil has picked these up and Wendy and Phil will look them over in the summer.
- Joëlle's application for Latrobe City grant for a 'Scope to Spy on Spoonbills' was successful. Amount $1793.40, application to be completed by 13 Dec 2019 with funds to be spent within 12 months. Joëlle is following up. The Davids will get together with Joëlle to make further decisions. Will likely need to supplement the funding with our own funds.
- ANN Get-together in Stanthorpe QLD, Sept 2020: EOI and Advice No 1 recently circulated.
- Latrobe Valley Express has not put in our publicity for the last few months. There has been a change of management so Alix will visit them to see if they will put it in again.

Conservation Matters

- Dawson Flora Reserve signage: Meeting with Kylie Singleton occurred on 17 October 2019 to clarify objectives and design constraints, and content is currently being revised.
- Mirboo North Greater Glider presentation, attended by a number of our members, was excellent.
- Strzelecki-Alpine Bio-link: Nothing to report at this stage.
- Delburn wind farm: David S planned to make contact with one or both of the groups that have formed; one group supports and one opposes the project. Decided the Club should not seek to be involved.
- The Botany Group visited Holey Plains in August, alongside members of the Sale Field Nats. The idea of doing regular surveys of the park was floated. Mitch from the Sale club has contacted Parks Victoria regarding the matter. Next park visit date could be late October to mid-November. Perhaps a special survey group could be constituted, something like the Prom'n'aides. Denis plans to review Greening Australia's post-fire survey protocols and pass them on to Mitch. Botany group will discuss our possible involvement at our next outing. Wendy has sent the final list from our August excursion to Mitch.

Guest speaker for November

Royce Raleigh

Royce is President of the Wimmera Growers of Australian Plants, and has an award-winning garden in Wartook set on 5 acres, formerly an open paddock, that now displays more than 1000 species of native plants. He has a particular interest in the pea family Fabaceae, and will talk about the diversity of species and how to identify them.



Summer Members' Night

Various speakers

January's meeting is our annual Summer Members' Night, where club members can present a short talk (~10 mins) on any topic related to natural history. A projector is available for showing Power Point presentations or photos, if required. If you would like to present to the group on this night, please register your interest by emailing David Stickney at david.stickney@westnet.com.au.



Thank you to everyone who contributed to The LV Naturalist in 2019.

Best wishes for a Merry Christmas and a safe and happy New Year to all our members, their families and friends.

Latrobe Valley Naturalist is the official publication of the Latrobe Valley Field Naturalist Club Inc. The Club subscription includes the "Naturalist".

Brief contributions and short articles on any aspect of natural history are invited from members of all clubs. Articles, including those covering Club speakers and excursions, would typically be around one A4 side in length, should not exceed 1,000 words, and may be edited for reasons of space and clarity. Photos should be sent as an attachment and be a maximum of 1 megabyte in size.

Responsibility for the accuracy of information and opinions expressed in this magazine rests with the author of the article.

Contributions should be addressed to:

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Deadline for articles to be considered for inclusion in the next issue (January/February): 30 December 2020

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Subscriptions are due on March 1st each year (half fees apply for those joining after 31 Aug)